Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, Kollam, Kerala (Also known as ‘ Hugging Saint’)

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AI Overview:

Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, known as "Amma," is a globally recognized spiritual leader and humanitarian whose primary ashram, the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, is located in Amritapuri, near Karunagappally in the Kollam District of Kerala, India, serving as a spiritual home for thousands and a center for humanitarian work, meditation, and darshans (hugs).

Key Aspects:

- **Location:** Amritapuri, a small village in Kollam, Kerala, situated between the Arabian Sea and backwaters.
- **About Amma:** Born Sudhamani Idamannel, she is famous for comforting people through spontaneous hugs, driven by a deep sense of compassion for suffering, leading her to found a vast charitable organization.
- **The Ashram (Mata Amritanandamayi Math):** A vibrant, international community where people from diverse backgrounds live, meditate, perform devotional activities, and engage in community service (seva).
- **Activities:** Visitors can experience darshans (hugs), join communal prayers (satsangs), meditate, and participate in the ashram's daily schedule.
- **Humanitarian Work:** The Math is an international charity focused on spiritual and material upliftment, embodying the principle of "the whole world is one family" (vasudhaivakutumbakam).

Visiting Amritapuri:

- It's a place for spiritual seekers to find peace and connect with Amma's teachings.
- Accommodation and basic amenities are available for visitors.
- Contact can be made via their website or email for inquiries and registration.

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Her parents

Father: Sugunanandan (a fisherman).

Mother: Damayanti (passed away on 19 September 2022).

Birth (location and year)

Born as Sudhamani Idamannel on 27 September 1953 in Parayakadavu (now partially known as Amritapuri), a small coastal fishing village in Alappad Panchayat, Karunagappally, Kollam District, Kerala, India.

Childhood

Born into a poor fishing family, she was the third of seven children.

From early childhood, she showed deep compassion, often sharing food and clothes with the needy despite family opposition.

She spent hours in deep meditation on the seashore, composed devotional songs to Lord Krishna, and entered trance-like states.

She helped with household chores and cared for siblings after her mother fell ill.

The family initially misunderstood her spiritual experiences, sometimes scolding or punishing her.

Education

Limited formal education—attended school only up to the fourth grade (around age 9), when she left to help with family responsibilities due to her mother's illness.

Spiritual inclination

From a young age, deeply devoted to Lord Krishna and later the Divine Mother (Devi).

She manifested Krishna bhava and Devi bhava states, dancing, singing bhajans, and entering deep samadhi.

Emphasizes universal love, compassion, selfless service (seva), meditation, and seeing the divine in all.

Teaches that devotion (bhakti), knowledge (jnana), and action (karma) are essential, and all religions lead to the same truth.

Her guru

No formal human guru mentioned; her realization came through intense personal devotion, sadhana, and divine grace.

She is considered a self-realized avatar by devotees.

Sadhana

Intense devotion from childhood: long meditations, chanting divine names, composing and singing bhajans, selfless service to the poor, and experiencing divine bhavas (Krishna and Devi).

She practiced rigorous austerity, often in trance or samadhi, absorbing suffering to console others.

Travels

Began annual world tours in 1987, visiting India extensively and countries worldwide (including USA, Europe, Australia, Asia).

Continues to travel globally for darshan programs, embracing millions and spreading teachings of love and service.

Realisation

Experienced profound spiritual states from childhood.

Around age 21-22, fully manifested divine consciousness, beginning to embrace people as a form of darshan.

Achieved complete identification with the Divine, viewing all as extensions of the Self.

Ashram (if any)

Main ashram: Amritapuri (Mata Amritanandamayi Math headquarters) in her birthplace, Kollam District, Kerala—home to over 3,500 residents (monastics, families, visitors).

Numerous branch ashrams and centers worldwide.

How to get there

Nearest International Airports -
1. Cochin International Airport COK (140 km)
2. Thiruvananthapuram International Airport TRV (105 km)

Nearest KSRTC bus stations -
1. Oachira (5 km)
2. Karunagappalli (9 km)

Nearest railway stations -
1. Oachira (ocr) (9 km)
2. Karunagappally (kpy) (9 km),
3. Kayamkulam (kyj) (15 km)

Her works - main teachings, literary, religious, spiritual, social, educational..etc

Main teachings: Unconditional love and compassion; selfless service (seva) as path to God; importance of meditation, bhakti, jnana, and karma; universal motherhood (vishwa matrutvam); all religions are valid paths; environmental protection; interfaith harmony.
Literary/Religious/Spiritual: Conversations transcribed into books like Awaken Children series (multiple volumes), From Amma's Heart, Lead Us to the Light, Eternal Wisdom. Composed thousands of bhajans in multiple languages.

Social/Educational/Humanitarian: Founded Embracing the World—global network for disaster relief, free healthcare (Amrita Hospitals), education (Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham University, schools), housing for poor, pensions for widows, orphanages, environmental initiatives (e.g., Clean Ganga, river cleaning).
Built tens of thousands of homes, provided millions of meals, scholarships, and medical care.

Key books about her life or teachings published from Amritapuri (Mata Amritanandamayi Math):

Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi: A Biography (by Swami Amritaswarupananda Puri) – Official biography detailing her early life, spiritual journey, and mission.

Awaken, Children! (Multi-volume series, e.g., Vols. 1–9) – Dialogues and conversations with Amma, transcribed by her disciples (primarily Swami Amritaswarupananda Puri).

From Amma's Heart – Conversations with Amma on various spiritual topics.

Eternal Wisdom (Upadeshamritam) (Vols. 1–2) – Collections of Amma's teachings and addresses.

Lead Us to the Light (Vol. 2 and others) – Amma's messages on special occasions.

Embracing the World: Images and Sayings of Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi – Photographic book with her quotes.

Bhajan books: Bhajanamritam (multi-volume devotional songs composed by Amma)

These are available through official channels like amritabooks.com, theammashop.org, or ashram publications.

Routines in her Ashram

Daily schedule includes early morning prayers, meditation, archana (chanting), bhajans, yoga, seva (selfless service), and study of scriptures.

Residents follow frugal, disciplined life with emphasis on spiritual practices and community service.

Amma often gives darshan (embraces) for hours, sometimes late into the night.

Her main disciples

Senior monastic disciples include Swami Amritaswarupananda Puri (vice-chairman), Brahmachari Amritatma Chaitanya (early disciple), Swami Paramatmananda Puri, Swami Ramakrishnananda Puri, and many sannyasis/sannyasinis (hundreds of brahmacharis/brahmacharinis).
Thousands of monastic and householder disciples worldwide.

Amma is alive and active as of January 2026 (age 72). She continues global tours, darshan, and overseeing humanitarian works.

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Amritapuri ashram itself is a major pilgrimage site with temples (e.g., Kali Temple). Numerous centers, hospitals, universities, and charitable projects worldwide serve as living monuments to her legacy.

Any successor

No designated successor announced; the Mata Amritanandamayi Math is led by Amma as chairperson, with senior swamis managing operations.

Any other info

Known worldwide as the "Hugging Saint" for embracing over 40 million people.

Chancellor of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham University.

Received numerous awards (e.g., Gandhi-King Award for Non-Violence).

Her organization has UN Special Consultative Status.

Emphasizes practical spirituality through service.

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Photos

Mata Amritanandamayi Devi's Ashram

Videos

Mata Amritanandamayi Ashram (2 min):

https://youtu.be/B7Ohf8Cx6dM?si=lb6w9-1oBuTa4Dri

Shivaratri at Amritpuri 2025 (3 min):

https://youtu.be/PVafmVN5Wx4?si=OqSsXy4_y7sUkZLt

Gurupoornima 2025 (8 min):

https://youtu.be/HcSEoL6aszs?si=yhItNhB46_o3burT

Mata Amritanandamayi Devi 70th Birthday 2023 (2 hrs 14 min):

https://www.youtube.com/live/CREJi7pOs9w?si=0INIexfjNlUQy968

Mata Amritanandamayi Devi's Biography (1 hr 37 min):

https://youtu.be/xpbabgj41hM?si=uXDzqjlz3Oe5woGF

Amrita Vishwavidya Peetham, Kollam (20 min):

https://youtu.be/q7Xv8Zqz9p0?si=2pB1UpUq8NedLqpi

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Dr. M. Thirumaleshwar
January 3, 2026

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